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AUTHOR Scarboro, Cheryl B.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the ways male and female fifth-grade writers compose short, open-ended autobiographical narratives. The research focused on whether students composed narratives reproducing society's prescription of reality according to gender roles, or whether they found their own voices, writing as autonomous writers representing their own worlds. The writers for the research consisted of 139 volunteer fifth graders from six public elementary schools in Jackson, Mississippi. All texts were read blindly. Six dependent variables (fluency, setting, theme, voice, content, and agency) were measured for observing writing differences between males and females. Results in each of these areas were as follows. First, fluency level between male and female writers were not different. Second, settings described were significantly different; boys were more likely to write about the public/occupational/outside world and girls were more likely to write about the private/inside/domestic world. Third, boys were more likely to choose adventure topics and women were more likely to choose familial topics. Fourth, girls were more likely than boys to write in passive voice, that is, one where their thinking is concealed and voice strives to please others rather than challenge society. Fifth, girls were more likely than boys to write about topics considered characteristically female. (Contains 33 references and 6 tables of data.) (TB)

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Writing and Difference:

The Student, Gender, and the Text

Cheryl B. Scarboro

Augusta College

Augusta, Georgia

Presented at the

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Writing and Difference:
The Student, Gender and the Text

This study investigated the ways female and male fifth-grade writers compose short, open-ended autobiographical narratives. The research focused on whether students composed narratives reproducing society's prescription of reality according to gender roles, or whether they found their own voices, writing as autonomous writers representing their own worlds.

Composing open-ended autobiographies reveals the authors' realities, at least at that moment in the writers' lives. The autobiography remains as one of the earliest acceptable genres in which women write. The earliest autobiography in English, for example, was written by Dame Margery Kempe (1940) in the fourteenth century. However, men have composed in this genre as early as Augustine's (1950) fourth century Confessions. The autobiography as a genre expresses the author's voice powerfully, since the autobiographical text recreates the writer's own life in the writer's own words.

The writers of autobiographies for this research consisted of 139 volunteer fifth graders from six public elementary schools

in Jackson, Mississippi. Fifth graders were chosen because they had experienced several years of writing in the elementary school and were at the boundary of moving into the middle school years. The research method was content analysis. All texts were read blindly. The researcher wanted to know if gender made a difference in these writers composing their life stories: gender of the writer (operationalized by the writer's sex) was the independent variable for this research. Six dependent variables (fluency, setting, theme, voice, content, and agency) were measured for observing writing differences between the female and male writers; hypotheses were tested with the independent variable for each of the six dependent variables and statistical tests of significance were conducted. A qualitative analysis accompanied the quantitative tests of the hypotheses.

The 139 student writers included 64 black females, 23 white females, one Hispanic female, 37 black males, 13 white males, and one Native American male. The student writers ranged in age from ten to thirteen years old; the mean age was 11.065 with a standard deviation of 0.621; the median age was 11 years old.

The Fluency Level of Female and Male Fifth Grade Writers

The count of the total number of words written by females and males provided the fluency level for each student. The

fluency levels for female and male students is shown in Table 1. Fluency ranged from a low of 19 words to a high of 873 words. The mean fluency level equalled 119.89 words, with a standard deviation of 102.35 words. The median score for fluency equalled 96 words. The interquartile range for fluency stretched from 60 to 149 words. Two students did not generate a text, so were scored as missing.

Table 1. Fluency Levels of Female and Male Fifth Grade Writers

Female	Male
$n_1 = 87$	$n_2 = 50$
$\bar{x} = 124.1$	$\bar{x} = 113.0$
$s_1 = 89.5$	$s_2 = 122.0$
$SSE_1 = 9.59$	$SSE_2 = 17.30$

$T = 0.58$, $p = 0.56$, $DF = 79$

The Two Sample T Test was employed to detect a significant difference between female and male student writers in fluency (Howell, 1987). The Two Sample T Test analysis indicated there was no statistically significant difference between the sex of the writer and fluency level ($T = 0.58$, $p = 0.56$, with 79 degrees of freedom).

The two highest scores for the female writers were 478 and 414 words. The two lowest scores for the female writers were 23

words and 0 words (one female student writer finished only the brainstorming process and did not write an autobiographical text). The two highest scores for the male writers were 873 and 276 words, while the lowest scores for the male writers settled at 24 and 0 words (one male student writer completed only the brainstorming process and did not write an autobiographical text).

Setting: A Public or Private World

This section moves to the choices student writers make when choosing a particular setting for their autobiographies. Their choices were coded as either the public/outside/occupational world or the private/inside/domestic world. Table 2 depicts the overall choices students made concerning setting. Of the 85 female student writers, 48 chose a public/outside/occupational setting, whereas 41 of the 49 male writers chose a public/outside/occupational setting. Chi square analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between the sex of the student writer and the setting, Chi square (1, N = 134) = 10,312, p = 3.842.

Table 2. Settings for Autobiographies of Fifth Grade Writers Grouped by Sex

Sex	Setting		All
	Public/Outside/ Occupational	Private/Inside Domestic	
Female	48	37	85
Male	41	8	49
All	89	45	134

*Chi square (1, N = 134) = 10.312, DF = 1 *$p < .05$

The difference was explained by the preference of the male student writers for the public setting. Of the 49 male writers, 84% chose the public setting, whereas 57% of the 85 female writers chose the public setting. This finding supported Chodorow's (1978) theory that females and males inhabited two separate cultural spheres. The female student writers' settings centered around the home, a friend's house, school, and indoor activities; some female student writers extended their settings to various trips to places like Disney World and on to seeing bear cubs in Alaska. The female writers crafted rooms and inner spaces and the activities within those spaces in greater detail and specificity than did most of the male writers who chose a domestic scene as a setting. For example, one ten-year old girl allowed her reading audience into her house; she spoke of a time

when she played with her godparents' three year-old daughter. She toured the house with her reader:

> I liked playing it [hide and go seek] at her house because she has a hudge house and in one of her closets are steps that lead you to the basement, in the basement is a door that leads you outside to the backporch, the back porch has stairs that lead you to the balcony, the balcony has a sliding door that leads you to the kitchen, the kitchen leads you to the living room.

One 11 year-old female sketched an even tighter inner room. She recalled the time of her first kiss:

> It was in the toy box. He had cherry candy on his breath. Then we stopped kissing. Cause I felt something crawling on me. I looked down, it was roach. My mother opened the toybox. She said, "Get out of their." That was my first kiss.

This was a very sensual piece of text: the sense of smell, a cherry flavor, suggested more than the young writer was prepared for at this time in her life. Touch, smell and inner space all adhered to Cixous's (Moi, 1985, pp. 113-118) writing out of the body, in particular, the female body which constantly touched the woman's inner world. Showalter (1982) would respond that already this young writer was trapped into the role of wanting to entice and please men.

At least one female autobiography departed markedly from the home setting. One ten-year old female writer meticulously outlined her ball field, including in her text a graph labeling all positions and dugouts. Her setting was a pictograph. More

time was spent on labeling than describing, a clean linear approach to setting. She had learned the male language for writing, but the genre within which she expressed herself was actually more typically female (see Spender, 1989; Davies, 1993). This piece of writing was important because its female author was in the public world, involved in an active traditional American sport, baseball. However, the writer was segregated from the male players; therefore, she had removed herself from complete public respect except from benevolent males.

The settings for the male autobiographies emphasized those outdoor activities typically described as male. Most of these activities discussed riding a bicycle, playing an organized sport, riding a horse, and swimming. Other settings included their schools or field trips. A few took place within a house. For some male writers, little emphasis was placed on assisting a reader in visualizing the setting. Instead of description, action remained important. For example, one 12 year-old male writer added only one detail for the reader concerning the setting, and that was the depth of the water:

> I remember when I went Swimming and I jumped In the 12 feet and I all most drown and the lifegured saved me and I was cocking [choking] from the warter and I was all right.

This story occurred outside; the male writer recounted taking some risk, following the myth that men are fearless, brave

and active. Nevertheless, that fear spurred the topic for his autobiography, permitting him to share his fear in a couched form of excitement and bravery.

A 12 year-old male writer drafted the lake or river as his setting, recording the first time he ever fished. He wrote:

> Ones upon an time It was the First time I went Fishing with my uncle Tenneal. So we was sitting on the bank. so we put a bake on the hook. We throughed it out in the water. About 5 seconds late a fish was on the line. so I pulled it up and it wa a cat fish. So my uncle said these fish catch fast. so my uncle said a fish [was] on my line he pulled it up it was a tutle.

The writer reproduced a story that fit the cultural image of what men do. Further, unlike the female writer who detailed the rooms of a house for at least three pages of text, this male writer acted within the setting rather than showing concern for the setting itself.

When male student writers chose the home as a setting, they usually informed the reader of some unhappy event, such as a grandfather's death or separation from a father or brother. The house created uncomfortable males; often the house continued to live as a place where the male writers felt outside their place of knowledge. Accidents, such as the one retold by an 11 year-old below, happened inside the home:

> When I got my head bust I did the rong thing. I was running around my house when my mother told me to stop. but I dent [didn't]. Then I stared to running in the house. Then David klip [clipped] me the[n] I hit my head on the table.

Chodorow (1978) would see this imaging of the house as the beginnings of the separation of the male child from the female mothering figure.

Theme: Adventure or Familial

Themes for the fifth grade autobiographies were coded into two categories: adventure or familial. The adventure theme included physical activity and organized competition, whereas the familial theme included the domestic nurturing world. Table 3 reveals the frequency of themes chosen by the female and male student writers. Chi-square analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between the sex of the author and the theme of the text, Chi square (1, N = 136) = 20.871.

The significant difference reflected the percentage of boys who chose an adventure topic over a familial topic. Of the male student writers, 80% (40) chose the adventure topic, but 61% (52) of the females chose the familial topic. Female students wrote on familial topics writing about divorce, parties (slumber, birthday and skating), family reunions, baby-sitting, cleaning house, a grandmother's death, friendship, a pet's death, and a cousin's murder. Adventure topics for the female writer focused on trips, a baseball game, karate, and a very physical fight with

a sister. A first day at school, also a major topic, focused on making friends.

Table 3. Themes for Autobiographies of Fifth Grade Writers Grouped by Sex

Sex	Themes		All
	Adventure	Familial	
Female	34	52	86
Male	40	10	50
All	74	62	136

*Chi square (1, N = 136) = 20.871, DF = 1 *p < .05

Many of these autobiographies reproduced society's traditional definition of woman as nurturer, and responsible caretaker of activities within the home. Some female writers portrayed how they were taught to follow the traditional female role of housekeeping and pleasing others expressed by an 11 year-old female writer:

> I remember the time I moved into the house with my cousins. I was eight years old in third grade I did not know how to clean up in no kind of way but they taught me. It was hard for me to learn how to cook, wash dishes, fold and wash clothes. I did not get a lot a whippings before but then I got a lot of them. My dishes were never clean at first, after a while they started to get clean. I remember when people had to go and refold clothes I had folded. When I was able to go out the house I would play with one person, Jennifer, because she was the only one I knew. When my cousins children came over I started missing clothes. My

> grades started going down and I got a lot of whippings because of that. I got on punishment a lot also. After my cousins started being hard on me I sometimes wondered if they even cared about me anymore.

These female student writers talked about baby-sitting roles thrust upon them, preventing time for adventure topics. One 11 year-old female narrated the arrival of her baby sister:

> I remember, when I was the only child. And it was the best time of my life. I did not have to look after any one but myself. I did not have to bath anyone but myself. All that is over now that I got a baby sister. My live is over but known [now] that she is five I don't have to change papers, so I guess it is better.

Caring for and nurturing others was the predominant theme in female writers's autobiographies. Dyson (1989) reported that young writers lived in multiple worlds of tension; Davies (1993) extended Dyson, arguing that women writers could not script worlds of desire, but rather lived within a world of oppression, reproducing those oppressive structures that limited their lives.

Male student writers wrote their life stories through the language of adventure. Often, these male writers participated in what Rubin (1976) defined as a "world of pain" (p. 1) where men abandoned any discourse of resistance, holding onto the image of tough guy. Their adventure topics exposed themes about bullies and physical fights, not unlike those guys in country music who hid a range of sadness. Learning-how-to-do-something appeared as one of the major adventure topics. Personal accidents as a result of particular adventures made the list of themes, as did

stories about various pets. Many themes transported the reader to playing fields of organized sports and to battling grounds where the male authors defended themselves against a band of girls who ran after them on the playground.

Familial themes also presented themselves in the male student autobiographies, although with less frequency than in female student autobiographies. Some males wrote stories showing great care for a family member of the same sex: the death of a grandfather, the absence of a brother or of a father. The male writers also discussed family reunions and picnics with cousins.

Reading the autobiographies of the male student writers, the researcher noted the energy expended by males testing their physical ability. There was a sense of aloneness in learning about the world, a bit of Rousseau's savage learner, a world of "a natural creature...governed by instincts and experiences" (Gutek, 1988, 73). An 11 year- old male confronts the text understanding that the experience was his. He spoke about riding a horse:

> I remember when I fell off a horse. I remember when I got on a horse and the horse started jumping and the horse started to run he ran for another horse. He ran so fast he turned the croner so fast I fell off.

The writer experienced an adventure by himself. This text displayed what Elbow (1981) called detached writing: very clean,

moving from one step to the next, lacking connection. The writer does not include other characters.

Some male student writers enjoyed competing and striving for a goal with other males. In the following story, a 12 year-old male writer delighted in some male bonding without too much close affection:

> i remember when I was in second grade a group of girls started to chase my friend and I tring to kiss us so we gave them the name kissy girls. i started to run one day and I was tackled by a group of girls. My friend saved me from the pack of girls. Then my friend was attacked by the vicous pack of girls but I pulled him out of the stack of girls piled on top of him like he did me. So that how we became best friends.

This text enlisted active verbs: tackled, attacked, pulled, and piled. Here, adventure language lived as the writer's native tongue; he thrilled himself by conquering all foes with his equals. The male existed as a valuable commodity for the females in the story, females who never roamed alone, but immersed themselves into Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) concept of peers constantly educating themselves in romance, patterning after strict, stereotyped gender roles. Again, this was a story of detachment: the author gave the friend no name and the point of the story fell in line chronologically; no necessity for making connections emerge, no relationships that involved talking with and trying to understand the other are recounted.

Male student writers discussed relationships without using the close nurturing language exhibited in the female writers' interpretation of familial topics. An 11 year-old male scripted a story about a much adored brother:

> I remeber my big brother ad how he always took me to the park every day. He would try to teach me how to play basketball. He and I always had a good time together. He would always bring me something new everyday. Me and my mom, dad, and my sister lived together in a apartment building in Brooklyn, New York and my brother lived upstairs. Then we had our apartment robbed and my mom and dad didn't want to live in New York any more so we moved and my brother did not. We moved to Jackson, MS. two or three years had past and I was still missing my brother. Intill one day my dad picked me up from basketball practice and there he was so happy I fell like screaming. One year had past then he had got shot and he lived though it. Because he was strouge [strong].

The younger brother informing the reader about the older brother used that individualist theme observed by Kohlberg (1976), a sense of separateness and making logical decisions. The younger brother's I was not deferential and displayed no sense of living as a secondary person. The brother missed his New York brother, but not in a way of a needy person who was incomplete without the other. There was no concern that the older brother would not be able to survive and there were no warm terms of endearment like love, such as were found in the female student writers' autobiographies. Again, the action words flowed as a native tongue: lived, robbed, moved, picked, and shot.

Again, the stereotypical image of strong male reproduces itself in the text with the words, "...because he was strouge [strong]."

Voice and Autobiography

Voice turned the reader's ear to the text, where the reader listened to another's experience. The native tongue of the writer spoken in the text, bringing the reader in as an active participant. Voiced text emerges from a strong of self with ones own unique way of speaking and revealing reality. On the other hand, voiceless text eluded risks and admitted some potential fear of being heard. Writers made a choice whether to speak in their own voice, or, unaware that they had a right to that voice, to choose to speak in deference to a more powerful authority. Table 4 demonstrates the choices about voice made by the fifth grader writers in their autobiographies. Chi square analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between the sex of the author and voice, Chi square (1, $N = 136$) = 4.746, DF = 1, $p < .05$. The difference was explained by the female writers selecting the passive voice for their texts: of the 86 female writers, 65% chose the passive voice whereas 54% of the 50 male student authors chose the active voice.

Table 4. Voice for Autobiographies of Fifth Grade Writers Grouped by Sex

Sex	Voice		All
	Active	Passive	
Female	30	56	86
Male	27	23	50
All	57	79	136

*Chi square (1, N = 136) = 4.746, DF = 1 *p < .05

Writers gained voice in an autobiography when they spoke in their native tongue, addressing readers as the unseen other, remembering tone, mood and accent of the speaking author. Voiced narratives were original and demanded the reader's attention, expressing a specific history and space. As described by Gilligan (1982), voice for the female writer developed after silence, when received knowledge had developed into subjective knowledge. The knower experimented and confronted her situation. An 11 year-old female student writer rolled with a humorous story as she developed some knowledge about the use of scissors:

> I rember when I was five years old and our house was around then [where] It is know [now]. One friday night [--]on friday nights we would useud to go to Burger King, or chruch's or Kuckucy fried chicken. My Mom and Daddy went to sleep and I look up on top of the refrigirator and I saw some sliver things and I was like hay Ive seen these thines before I used them in my class everyday but I heard the teacher say that scissors are dangerous. So that night I tride so hard to get the scissors down at that point of time I knew

> what a broom was so I got the broom and I tryed so very hard to get the[m] down and then I got then down and cut off all my hair and then my Mom wok up and I gave my Mom all my hair.

This autobiography displayed a writer who liked talking about a moment when she became a knower. She experimented with an instrument labeled dangerous, but trusted her ability to really see what scissors could do. Voice radiated when she dialogued with herself, "...hay Ive seen these tines before...." Apparently, she felt no fear about cutting her hair, and did the traditional female act of sharing what she accomplished with her mother, not her father. She connected with her teacher and her mother, sharing learning with a web of females within a domestic, nurturing world.

A sample of passive voice within the domestic setting came from a 10 year-old recalling her ninth birthday party. She wrote the following:

> I remember my nineth birthday party. I[t] was Friday, August thirteenth. i was having a spend t[h]e night party. All my friends and I were sitting in a circle in the living room telling jokes, that was untill my sister interupted. She's always doing somethin to annoy me. so I told her to 'bug off and get out of our business' but she didn't pay any attention to me, she never does.

The student writer spoke to the reader, "telling on her sister", as she sat in a circle with a group of friends, a setting of connection rather than detachment. The voice never truly confronted the sister, since the writer used passive techniques.

The reader walked away with unresolved feelings about the sister, shown by the tag at the end of a sentence, "...she never does," rather than setting specific limits on her sister's behavior and then following through on those limits.

The many examples of voiceless papers by these authors never allowed the reader to connect with the mind of the text. Some female writers constructed walls to elude any reflection on their part about an experience in their life. One female student writer composed such a voiceless piece about a field trip:

> I remember when we went on our first field trip. We went to the zoo it was very fun. We saw elephants, monkeys, tigers, snakes. i fed the elephants. i gave the monkeys a banana. We fed the goats. i bought popcorn, drink, and a hotdog. I had fun. We had fun we had a stomache ache to. i ate all i could eat this was the best first grade field trip I had. and that is my story.

This writer showed herself powerless to discuss what went through her mind on this field trip. She presented a list of what she did on her field trip, a list more appropriate to a clean essay, a list that remained void of anything but facts. Her text had a good sense of order, but showed little evidence of seeing and reseeing an event.

An example of a male engaged in his voice was a story about learning how to float on water. The writer risked reflection and reseeing an event in his past. This 11 year-old used his voice to make decisions for himself:

> I remember when my dad was teaching me how to swim. I was scared because that was the first time in deep water without floats. He told me to lay on my stomach and when I did, I went to the bottom.
>
> After that trying to [float on my] back but I will sink to te bottom of the pool. By the end of the [day] I knew how to float on water, but I told myself "I will never go in deep water with my dad unless I can swim good."

This young male student writer reflected upon being frightened but was determined to perform. The last quote found a writer with his own empowered voice ready to conquer a fear confidently. Competition was the theme, and the son was going to show his father his own strength and abilities.

Voiceless papers by male writers often occurred in the retelling of sports events. Even though a team worked together for victory, retelling the story resulted in bare facts and an account of the order of events. Again, no reflection. All details were as cleanly written as were the rules of a game. "My First Baseball Game" portrayed events in the language of detachment:

> I remember in the spring last year when me and my dad went to sign up for baseball at the North Jackson baseball field's.
>
> My coaches name was Joel Watters. I met him the first day at practice.
>
> when i started practacing I didn't know anybody. But I got to know them. After practacing a while my coach said we have our first game Saturday.

The writer listed one event after another. The student had difficulty getting into the autobiography. A linear genre suited

his style and language. He could tell the story as a list or essay, genres which did not require him to use the personal.

Content of Autobiographies

This next section reviews the content of the fifth grade autobiography. The content of the texts was operationalized through an index of five indicators, each ranked in a range. The indicators were: (a) the number of characters (fewer than three or more than three); (b) the sex of the main character, other than the author (same sex as the author or different sex); (c) activity assigned to the second main character (high or low); (d) issues (rule-bound or relationship-bound); and, (e) organization (high or low). Table 5 shows the choices these fifth grader writers make in content. Chi-square analysis indicated there was a statistically significant difference between the author's gender and content choices, Chi square (1, N = 137) = 20.057, DF = 7, $p < .05$. The difference can be explained by the high score of the female student writers' composing techniques matching those in the literature described as female. The male student writers in this study also adhere to the language and choices described by the literature as male techniques for writing.

Table 5. Content Index for Autobiographies by Fifth Grade Writers Grouped by Sex

Sex	Rank in Scores								All
	Low							High	
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Female	0	3	8	14	24	24	13	1	87
Male	1	0	11	19	8	6	5	0	50
All	1	3	19	33	32	30	18	1	137

*Chi square (1, N = 137) = 20.057, DF = 7 *p < .05

Some female student writers wrote linear autobiographies, following traditionally logical, orderly ways of seeing reality. They had learned the language of the five-paragraph essay, the traditional classroom norm, with its avoidance of voice and of reflection that might run counter to the teacher's checklist. One female student writer incorporated stereotypical male language in discussing winning a first prize in the science fair. Science stresses the quantitative approach for finding truths, with a tight formulaic approach for discussing reality. Supposedly, in scientific thinking, the self is erased, although more and more scientists speak in the first person (Keller, 1990). Nevertheless, this young scientist in her autobiography opted for a linear chronological description with no inner evaluations. She wrote like a man. She outlined her experience for her reader:

> It was February 22, 1992 the day of the Science Fair I did a project on "How to Make a Camera". I got a few pictures of the judges from my camera I made by hand. Later on that day we all the whole school came to get their projects when I got my project I had a blue ribbon that say 1st prize.

As Lightman (1993), a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reminded us, even Einstein wrote narratives and daydreamed about the universe (pp. 3-7), a point made as well by Barnett (1952). Narration told Einstein the story of what was happening in his mind--imagination, after all, brings forth new concepts in science after playful interludes. In that April of 1905 when Einstein imaged his theory of special relativity, he

> dreamed many dreams about time. His dreams [had] taken hold of his research...so that he sometimes [could] not tell whether he [was] awake or asleep....Out of many possible natures of time, imagined in as many nights, one seem[ed] compelling (Lightman, 1993, p. 6).

An autobiography reflects, speaks with a voice, and has emotion, but what happened within that female student writer's text? The female student chose the male language, perhaps because her story referred to a subject mostly dominated by males. She did not have to read Watson's <u>The Double Helix</u> (1968) to understand the precarious position woman held in science. Elbow (1981) referred to this type of writer as one who played the doubting game, a strategy of having an organized plan with a thesis statement and hypothesis before writing the text.

According to Elbow, the doubting writer constantly played devil's advocate, removing passion from the text, admitting only facts.

The male language flowed with the very first statement of the text, "It was February 22, 1992 the day of the Science Fair." The focus is immediate and very up front for the reader. In typical female writing style, the thesis statement was more usually hidden throughout several passages of the paper. This 10 year-old female writer's "When I Won First Prize" limited her characters to the author and judges, providing no real identity for the judges.

Next, the researcher looked at the gender of the other main character and the type of activity assigned to that character. The text above presented difficulties since the author omitted any information about the judges, focusing rather on the steps for completing her science project. She was active--taking pictures of the judges with her hand-made camera. However, even her science project was not one that posed a question in which the scientist had a right to failure through empowerment and ownership of ideas. This author never asked a question, nor showed any knowledge of a discourse of resistance (Davies, 1993). In the end, she copied a process step-by-step from some science book. The system rewarded those without voice.

The last two items in the content index were the types of issues discussed within the autobiography, and the type of

organization. The issues were coded as either rule-bound (detached) with the Kohlberg (1976) emphasis on the individual or separateness; or they were relationship-bound (connected) with the Gilligan (1982) emphasis on sharing to gain knowledge. The writer chose a rule-bound issue, a science competition, and her text exhibited a high, almost mechanical, organizational level. Even lines in the text were drawn with a straight-edge, making sure the text showed perfect, straight lines for telling her story. There was no emotional jumping up and down when she won first prize. She had left the text, able to detach herself in the male language, leaving aside the female language of connection.

The next autobiography, written by an 11 year-old girl, resembled the stereotypical language of a female writer. The text reminded the researcher of Heilbrun's (1988) thesis that women quickly learned to write in a stylized way, characterizing the woman writer as passive. She wrote about a favorite pet whose puppies died. The young female writer mourned their passing:

> I remember when my dog Classie had puppies at her birthday when she was in her pen. We each got one and their names where Mopsy, Flopsy, Nixie and Ned. I love them all.
>
> then one day when I went to the pen to feed them they were all covered over something so I moved them away from each other and I saw Nixie laying there I didn't know what to do so I got her up and took her

inside and showed her to my mom. She told me to get all of them and I did.

We took them to the vet and he said they all were dying and if they were dying the mother was to. He also said the mother would dye cause of the disease in her body and the more she give milk the bacteria was getting into to the puppies as well.

Then the next day they all were dead all I could do was cry. Then I buried them in the backyard. That's all I could remember.

When the young author gathered her pencil for writing her story-line, she showed the influence of another female author, Beatrix Potter; the names of two of the puppies came straight from Peter Rabbit. The researcher wondered if the fifth grade writer knew Potter as the eccentric author who enjoyed her sheep farm, not marrying until late in life. Potter drew sketches of dead animals and plants, not particularly seeing herself as a good English housewife (Meyer, 1987). However, Potter wrote sweet stories about a male rabbit and his adventures, rather than making the main character a female adventurer like herself. Potter left out the image of the rugged woman, just as young girls do today, not writing about their tree-climbing and field-roaming experiences.

This text had at least five characters: the author, the mother dog, the puppies, the author's mother, and the veterinarian--indeed a web of relationships. The main authority character was the veterinarian, a male with the scientific answers. So a male spoke as a reassuring patriarch, giving much-

listened-to advice. The female writer drew male figures in her text, granting them active roles--locating and analyzing problems, a pattern seen in the literature where boys frequently omit the female or had her only in a very small corner of the story.

This was a relationship-bound story with tears and death. Female writers, before they became empowered, listened to a strong division of what women might be in their stories: Madonna or Eve are the typical possibilities (Sims, 1975). These authors chose one or the other for their characters. The little girl wept, the Madonna effect, collecting the little puppies, attempting to save them as would a good mother. Carefully, she named each puppy, feeling responsible for their care. These stories served the institution well, keeping young females within an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1882). They also kept them speaking the passive language that many male peers sensed as deprecating and which they accepted as appropriate for females. Thus, females did not pose a threat to the male hegemonic place.

The narrative on the dying puppies had a sense of order; this author was in her home genre: the narrative. The reader understood the events of the story in some clear order. This student wrote an acceptable story, one within the realm defined as appropriate for females, rather than finding a discourse of resistance.

One 11 year-old male writer did not follow one of society's rules for what it meant to be male: real men do not cry. He resisted that rule, writing about his tears on the first day of school, crossing the line to what women do:

> On my first day of school I didn't think I was gonna make it. It was really tough. And I was really scared for three weeks straight. I went home that day crying because my classmates made fun of me. I told my mother that I didn't want to go back to school. But after she got finish talking to me, I was happy. That Monday I came home and said "mom I love school." But the next three weeks my classmates started back meddling me. I had started back crying. I was really, really, sad. I didn't like school for about a month. But when I went back to school I just ignored them, and went on by my business. I didn't cry no more after that. I was very, very glad. My mother talked to me one more time. I said, "Im sorry I started crying, but Im happy now mom. I love you mom.

This piece limned the pain and tears of a suffering and passive female. This author wrote on the margins, unable to rage against the night like Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye.

The mother's voice was not heard but felt as the powerful consoling voice whom the first grader wished to please and honor. Mother knew the rule of pushing away the son so he might survive without her. He did not want to return where others "made fun of" him and "meddled" with him. Aching with pain, he tried to ignore his classmates. This was not the type of tale a male student easily wrote and shared with his classmates. The male was strong, and he eventually realized he must stop crying, "Im

sorry I started crying, but Im happy now mom. I love you mom." Perhaps the male child, too, experienced the world of pain but is hampered in speaking the language of sorrow and of the need for nurturing.

Three characters inhabited this text: son, mother and classmates; none of these characters had a high level of physical activity, other than the classmates' teasing. The text struggled for a clear focus. This relationship-bound text showed a sense of helplessness and dependency.

Had the male fifth-grader written as a traditional male, the reader would have experienced hero language and competition. The male writer of this text did not find the language of resistance for finding his identity. Twelve year- old males more typically thrived on the baseball star image, composing texts with active male characters in rule-bound stories:

> I remember, when when we had a baseball game, and I won the game for my team. It started out with the first inning, they were up to bat, they hit a fly ball and I jumped up and caught the ball. It was our bat and I hit a line drive and got on second base, and then my friend Brown hit a line drive and I got home and he got on first base. It was the bottom of the nineth three men was on each base. I hit the up into the air it flew start over the gate and we wond the game 12-9. We celebrated we ran the bases and cheered and stuff and then we went over the coaches house and had a big party. We ate, chips pizza, hot dog, popcorn and sandwiches. The drinks we drunk was Sprite, High C, coke and Icecream, we stand at the coaches house from 7:00-10:30 because it was a Friday and we had a good time.

This text followed a clear logical order, listing events and clearly focusing on the game and the author as hero.

The male text ignored or omitted females and noted the physical or mental abilities of the man to override conflict. This student believed he won the game, detaching nimself from other teammates, ignoring collective efforts for success. How easily he took in the American myth that individuals are responsible for their own success. In a celebration without connection, the warrior arrived and left alone.

Agency in the Autobiographies

Agency was the last variable analyzed; it referred to whether the writers were empowered by writing about issues important to them. Writers with agency were autonomous, seeing themselves as actors within their texts, rather than writing the voice of society. Table 6 reveals the choices writers made about agency. Chi square analysis indicated there was a significant difference between the sex of the writer and agency within the text, Chi square (1, N = 137) = 27.896, DF = 1, $p < .05$. Of the 50 male student writers, 66% wrote with agency while only 21% of the 87 female student writers wrote with agency.

Table 6. Agency for Autobiographies of Fifth Grade Writers Grouped by Sex

Sex	Agency		All
	Empowered	Unempowered	
Female	18	69	87
Male	33	17	50
All	51	86	137

*Chi square (1, N = 137) = 27.986, DF = 1, *p < .05

Many of the female student writers chose to write autobiographies where the rules and action took place outside themselves. They wrote story-lines where others were more powerful and important than themselves, so they described themselves behaving powerlessly. One writer waited for letters from and worried about a male cousin in the army. She shed tears, not playing the role of Jo in Alcott's Little Women who actively pursued events without thinking of gender roles (MacDonald, 1988). Of course, Alcott wrote to support her family since her father long failed to maintain his family financially; her active female characters reflected Alcott's own empowerment. This young female student writer did not know the history of female empowerment.

Other female student writers engaged themselves in wishfully hoping that others would accept them as friends. Many spoke of

being forced to play the mother role; two wrote about themselves as babies; another wrote about her dad's back surgery, stressing how she assisted in his getting better. The following was one example of forced activity where the writer saw no choice but to accommodate to the wishes of others:

> I remember when my sister had her baby January 21,1994. That morning I became and aunt. It was very hard. Because when my sister was going to school most of the time I took care of the baby. It seemed like I was the mother. Becausing I did so much for him.

This student did not confront her anger at having unwanted responsibility thrust upon her, choosing instead the martyr, good mother role.

Another female student writer discussed going to the fair with her family. A sense of being protected by others flowed through the text:

> I remember when I was at the fair. I got on the spider. It took me so high in the air that I yell. And I turn around so fast that I jump. When I got out my mom and sethdad took me over to look at the snakes. It was given me the creeks. I hate snakes. And I saw a mouse It was little. My mom and sethdad took me over where some fish was when I thorw a ball in a fish I had a fish. I like watching a fish swim.

She chose to write a story where she must be protected from the possible dangers of a snake; her fear of snakes conditioned her for passivity. She liked watching, not doing, reproducing the roles of the passive woman rather than seeing her own possible strengths. Again, this student did not recreate the history of

those female scientists who walked the jungles studying and contributing scientific knowledge about the great apes, writing their scientific stories qualitatively in their own tongue (Montgomery, 1991).

Some female writers took action within their texts. One decided to go against the desires of her family that she play the piano like a proper young woman. She abruptly closed the piano lid, asserting her desires:

> I remember when I first started to take piano. I was so proud when I came home because I could play my first piece. I loved to practice.
>
> After a while I got pretty good at piano but the harder the songs got the more I hated practicing. Soon I so frustrated I just wanted to give up on the pieces that I just couldn't get. I couldn't stop until school was out for the summers. so when I had to tell my piano teacher she was upset because she didn't want me to stop but I wanted to so I stoped!

This writer took a giant step, asserting her needs and desires rather than falling into the trap of always pleasing others. She actively made a decision for her own benefit, not accommodating to the situation, writing as an empowered person.

Another student wrote as an active participant leaving the bystander, cheer-leading role in the dust. She anxiously prepared herself for competition on field day, wanting to push her skills to the limit:

> I rember the day of field day at my old school. It was a bright and sunny day. All of the classes were on the field. It was the fourth grade's turn to do their events. My events were the 100 dash race and the soft

> ball throw. I did the 100 dash race first, I was neverous. When I reach the finish line I won first place! I was so happy. Then I did the soft ball throw. Wow! I won first places again. And my teacher and classmates were proud of me.

She wrote about what she could do, gathering some of the male strength of detachment and keeping focus.

The unempowered male student writer displayed a story of loss and dependency similar to the stereotypical writing of the female. The male writer used this method, one which risked his losing his male image. One writer told the stressful story of the absent father:

> I remember win [when] my dad played with me. He would play football with me. And he would play basteball with me. He would play baseball with me. But he does not play with me now. He left 2 years agao. He and my mom got saparated. He use to do thing with me but know he does not. He does not even want to see me.

Stoically, a silent pain sat where an enormous rage against the shattered piece of glass in his life held a void. As a writer, he felt powerless, unable to confront those who placed him in such a fragile, needy position. He listed what he had lost: most of the loss was himself. The rules and all decisions for his life were made without the influence of his voice.

Another powerless voice emerged from a male student writer whose infantile language erased his sense of self. He remembered diminutive things--those events which prevented his emerging as a powerful active being:

> I remember when I was a little boy I use to go to the zoo all the time. When I first learned how to tie my shoe. And ride my bike. It was fun being a little boy but it didn't last always.

He missed the time when he was sheltered and mourned that that time did not last long. The writer did not exhibit strong independence, being unable to turn the kaleidoscope to make decisions for himself.

Other male student writers wrote with agency, acknowledging strength within themselves to confront and challenge whatever happens. One talked about learning how to swim by himself, proud of accomplishing a goal:

> I remember the first time I went swimming. Every time I got in the water I always sunk to the bottom. I almost drowned once. My sister had to come get me out. I had to stay out of the water a while just to get the water out of my nose. I did not like to use a floater because I wanted to learn how to swim. In about four weeks I finally learned how to swim. It seems the only thing I like to do was to go under water. I don't know why since I almost drowned.

He set a goal which he intended to meet regardless of how many times he sank. He had the history of Huckleberry Finn at the water holes, and he was too manly to use the float while spitting water and going under. He was the lone victorious warrior in control of his fate so much so that he was able to reflect upon his experience in the water with his statement, "I don't know why since I almost drowned." He walked away with one more strong identity in his pocket for facing a constantly changing world.

Another warrior sang about his prowess in solving a bully problem and eventually protecting his classmates. He understood his own power:

> I was the topp 6 of first grade. I really had a great time. to that one day, there was a eight year old bully who use to push me and my friends around a lot. He did not like me the most.
>
> One day, I gave him a punch and the rib. I got my first trip to the office. I was worth it. I might got in trouble, but I didn't care.

He acted logically, deciding what he should do much as Kohlberg (1976) suggested. The bully broke the rule of peaceful coexistence, infringing upon the rights of the author and his friends. The consequences were swift to the punch, not worrying about the consequences administered by the adults, because the writer knew his individual rights.

The last example of an emerging empowered male student writer occurred on a family picnic with cousins. The author experienced the rural world on that day:

> When I went on a picnic with my Aunt, my parents, couins and brothes. every one brought, some thing to eat. We had a bal we did many thing. We had a huge cake. And I had two hot dogs and three big piece[s of cake]. After we went down to the lake and throw in some rocks. Then we played football and my team won. Next we went back to the lake and this time we saw many frogs, fish and lots of insects, We caught some frogs and looked at them. Then we let them go. We washed our hands. As we were leaving. We saw some horses running across the field then we stoped and looked at them we, saw many colors of horses we saw brown, tan, brown red, white and black. After we went home and every one got [to] tak[e] some thing home.

The reader became part of this writer's eye. As writer, the author placed himself in the various activities: throwing rocks and catching fish. He liked his text, stopping to take time to visualize the many colors of horses. In the end, he left the text, keeping a private world in his head as an empowered traveler finding his own realities.

Summary of the Data and Conclusions

Five of the hypothesized differences between female and male fifth-grade writers were found to be statistically significant. For one dependent variable, the test did not permit the rejection of the null hypothesis of no difference. These findings support a revision in the teaching of writing to female and male elementary student.

The first conclusion drawn from the data analysis finds no difference in the fluency level of female and male writers. The female fifth-grade writers wrote an average of 124 words and the males an average 113 words. Previous research (Barnes 1990) suggests that female writers would generate more words within their stories. This finding supports Spender's (1985) debunking of the myth that women are wordier than men in oral conversations.

The second conclusion in this study finds a difference in the settings described by female and male fifth-grade writers.

These writers do make different choices of setting. The 85 female writers split their choices, with 48 (56%) choosing the public/outside/occupational world and 37 (44%) choosing the private/inside/domestic world. Forty-one (84%) of the 49 male writers restrict themselves to the public/outside/occupational setting, with only 8 (16%) males recording their life story within the private/inside/domestic world. The female writers experiment with both realities: the public and private. The male writer limits himself to the public world. This finding is consistent with Chodorow's (1978) theory that the male is heavily influenced in the development of his personality by his separation from the mother. The male cannot be contaminated by the woman's culture. However, many of these female student writers, at this stage in their education, do not restrict themselves to one world or the other.

The third conclusion in this study discusses the female and male choices of theme, adventure or familial, within their story lines. The findings show there is a difference in the themes chosen by females and males. Out of 86 females, 34 (40%) choose adventure topics while 52 (60%) opt for familial topics. These female writers typically remain within the domestic world of reality, scripting stories along the lines of Gilligan's (1982) responsibility of care, exhibiting in their writings a woman's culture. Out of 50 males, 40 (80%) write with adventure topics

whereas 10 (20%) write familial topics. These male writers remain individuals scripting realities consistent with Kohlberg's (1976) study of college males that found his male respondents characterized by a sense of logical justice, with its physical activity and organized competition. So, themes project the possibility of different realities between female and male fifth-grade writers and different languages for expressing those realities.

The fourth conclusion in this study exposes voice of the female and male fifth-grade writers, whether they choose to write with active or passive voices. The findings show there is a difference in voice according to the sex of the writer. Of the 86 females, 30 (35%) script an active voice where they dialogue with themselves, trusting themselves, able to confront and detach themselves from the text and others. However, 56 (65%) females restrict themselves to a passive voice, one where their thinking is concealed, writing to please others rather than challenging any of society's rules. These female writers live in a world of silence and dependency, a finding consistent with the study of older female knowers by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986). On the other hand, 27 (54%) males out of 50 write in an active voice while 23 (46%) write in a passive voice. Male fifth grade writers show a greater tendency than do female fifth grade

writers for writing with an active voice, for writing with their own authority.

The fifth conclusion in this study discusses the content of the autobiographical narratives. Content was defined as the choices made by female and male fifth-grade writers regarding their autobiographical narratives. The number of characters the writers include in the narratives, the sex of the main character other than the author, the activities assigned to the second main character, the issues the narratives address, and the level of organization the texts show. The findings show a difference in the content according to the sex of the author. The analysis indicates that, of 87 female fifth grade writers ranked on a scale of one to ten--the higher the rank the more the writer exhibits what the literature describes as traits characteristic of female learners and knowers. Of the 62 female student writers, 71% scored at seven or above; only 19 (38%) of the male fifth-grade writers score within this range. Of the female writers, 25 (29%) score at 6 or lower on the scale, whereas of 50 males 31 (62%) score in the 6 or below range. This finding supports Chodorow's (1978) concept of separate cultures for the developing females and males; further, it suggests that females and males may approach writing with different realities, based on structures following a detached or connected way of seeing the world.

The last conclusion from the data analysis concerns agency, whether the fifth-grade autobiographical writers are empowered, autonomous actors within their own stories. The findings show there is a difference in agency according to the sex of the writer. Out of 87 females, 18 (21%) are empowered writers who actively make autonomous decisions rather than blindly following rules located outside of themselves. However, 69 (79%) of the 80 females write with a reality where rules and action take place outside of themselves. Of 50 males, 33 (66%) write as active autonomous writers who as knowers see themselves as agents of their own lives. Seventeen (34%) males script texts where they are powerless, unable to see themselves as being detached from rules established by society. This finding supports Heilbrun's (1988) conclusion that females write prescribed autobiographies, reproducing society's male-normed image of women.

Pedagogical Recommendations

The time for pentimento, for reseeing what was there for the researcher before she began this text on writing and difference, has appeared. Like Hellman (1979), the researcher turns one design and finds another spreading to the edges of her eye. Previous to this research, the pieces of the kaleidoscope were tightly positioned and ready for change, with certain shapes and colors dominating others. That perception of the old writer

shapes and transforms into the new writer who sees those earlier apparently pre-designed shapes and forms emerging from chaos into new forms and roles. Society's structures and institutions reproduce what it defines as female or male. Society's structures of control shape students' writing according to their sex and that sex's prescribed gender and world view. Feminists like Russ (1983), Showalter (1982), and Spender (1985, 1989) view this control as political, as oppressive toward females. They have considered ways to free female writers. The researcher remembers the strength of Beauvoir's (1952) words commenting that one is not born a woman, but becomes one. That is, gender is reproduced (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990). Foucault (1984a) argues that one "cannot separate knowledge from power" (p. 7). Reproduction means that the knowledge stays the same, keeping the designs in the kaleidoscope constant; therefore Foucault (1984a) stresses that it is important that one not become what one is. That is, do not become the label society has assigned. So, how may student writers gain the freedom to script their multiple worlds and selves?

The stress is on difference--that, in fact, we are not all alike, that a mold or tension continues growing in a classroom of multiple worlds. Sciachitano (1992) shares that within a classroom there is "...a need for something other than consensus, for the creation of space for students' differences" (p. 301).

The female and male fifth grade students in this study write using different ways of knowing: the ethics of care and of logic (Kohlberg, 1976; Gilligan, 1982). They focus on different issues and speak different languages. Within classrooms, differences for both sexes must be acknowledged and respected, rather than respecting or privileging one group over the other.

To assist students in becoming empowered writers, Murray (1985) encourages teachers to write in their own multiple worlds, thereby modelling difference for their students. Greenhalgh (1992), concerned about the teacher's voice, suggests that teachers explicitly identify their voices, locating them in biographical and social contexts, and reflect about the effects of their own voices upon student voices. He continues, these teachers should avoid the role of evaluator when responding to student drafts.

Further, the teacher of writing who has the knowledge of multiple worlds decentralizes authority in the classroom and values various types of writing. The essay has long been a powerful structure within the academic setting because it is seen, according to Berthoff (1981), as "guided structure writing." Berthoff, recognizing the value of creative writing, responds with, "Are poems a matter of marshmallows and butterflies?" (p. 26). The expository piece and the narrative speak different languages even when they verbalize the same

topic: think of it as Japanese and French. Both genres come to know something, but they process differently because of their unique experiences. Hollis (1992) refers to Jense and DiTiberio's discussion of 16 different psychological orientations and composing styles. For example, those with the "feeling orientation" make their decisions according to values, not logic. This writer, which is typically defined as the female, must write from the personal or she is blocked; writers of this orientation and style will add items to the piece, just to continue the conversation, even if it is not on the original outline.

The classroom that provides space for female and for male writers allows for the right to choose, according to Graves (1983; 1984). Choice in the topic provides that conscious ownership nurtured in Freire's (1989) pedagogy. Dialogue and interaction is the next necessary ingredient in a classroom that promotes and supports writing and difference, a classroom where response groups are formed and where teachers hold writing conferences with the student writers.

However, Dyson (1993) cautions that just being in a response group does not make a child "socially sensitive" (p. 7). Davies (1993) would suggest that the teacher directly teach difference, dialoguing with the children about where they have seen what they have written within their culture: on television, in magazines and books, in church, through plays, etc.

To understand difference, students need to write to a variety of audiences, a technique promoted at the Mississippi State University Writing/Thinking Institute (Scarboro, 1993). Multiple worlds and multiple thinking processes appear in this type of exercise. However, it is important that teachers are aware of the history of female students as writers. Acknowledging Gilligan's (1982) concept of the ethic of care, writing teachers must remember that female writers are concerned about the effect of their words upon their audience, according to Jense and DiTiberio (cited in Hollis, 1992). The teacher must listen to and encourage the student to speak directly to the audience, providing support in face of the writer's anxiety.

Powerful writers experience writing in different genres. Teachers must understand the different processes and problems females and males writers have in writing in the different genres. For example, when the female writes an essay, the teacher should allow her to move from the personal into the expository. With rewriting, the female writer may learn to drop some of the personal for the audience that demands the exclusion of personal. The male writer, when writing a narrative, may need to begin with an outline or webbing.

A variety of writing models for both females and males should be present in the classroom. Biographies should be read and discussed with an awareness of what was left out of stories,

as Heilbrun (1988) suggests. Both females and males develop as knowers when exposed to the history of writers of their sex.

Empowered student writers thrive in classrooms where they make choices, where they experiment with their perspectives, where they remain conscious of the writing act, and where they constantly critique their own writing. Empowered students write without fear, but work with shared understandings within their classroom community. Empowered writers, Dyson (1988) says, "...move into multiple worlds...deal[ing] with tensions among the varied symbolic and social worlds within which they write..." (p. 2).

Finally, Foucault (1984b) would see empowered students as continuously creating themselves as "work[s] of art" (p. 34). Only teachers who bring the tools of empowerment to the classroom can help students empower themselves.

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